

**The Ability Experience and Best Buddies International:
A National Partnership on a Local Level**

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Evan Neace

**Thesis Advisor
Dr. Derek Berger**

Signed

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

May 2016

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2016

Abstract

In August of 2014, an official partnership formed between two national non-profit organizations that serve people with disabilities: Best Buddies International and The Ability Experience. The Ability Experience is owned and operated by Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity. Since both Best Buddies and Pi Kappa Phi are collegiate student organizations, the success of this partnership is dependent upon the actions of individual universities. Using Ball State University as part of their "pilot program," the headquarters looked to this university to measure the success of the national partnership on a local level. The researcher examined documents, conducted personal correspondence with headquarters staff, and completed nine interviews with members from Best Buddies, Pi Kappa Phi, and an off-campus non-profit organization that serves as the host and provider of clients for both organizations. The author divided the data into four main categories: *Benefits, Weaknesses, Personal Perceptions, and Knowledge of the Partnership*. This case study provides some of the first insight into the success, failures, and impressions of this partnership. This study concludes by discussing the "triangularity" of this relationship and ways that it can be improved moving forward.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank...

Dr. Derek Berger for his help and guidance as my advisor for this project.

Dr. John Emert for assisting me in identifying this area of research.

All the friends, family, faculty, and staff that supported me through my undergraduate career.

Introduction

In August of 2014, Best Buddies International (BB) and The Ability Experience (TAE), formally named Push America, formed a nation-wide organizational partnership. Both non-profit organizations serve adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). According to the BB website, it's mission includes creating opportunities for one-on-one friendships, employment, and leadership development for people with IDD. The mission statement of TAE, which can be found on it's website, says it is dedicated to using shared experience to support people with disabilities. With very similar mission statements, the combination of these two non-profit organizations shows that a partnership has the potential to further the goals and aspirations of both organizations. TAE is owned and operated by Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity (PKP). In August of 2014 at the 54th Supreme Chapter of PKP, the national partnership between BB and TAE was officially announced (Horman, 2014).

Both TAE, because of its association with PKP, and BB rely heavily on college members. At different universities across the country that have chapters of PKP and/or BB, they depend on students being members of their student organizations. While the partnership was formed between the headquarters of the two non-profits, the implementation of the program has been the responsibility of each individual chapter on a local level. In order to monitor the progression of how this national partnership trickled down to local campuses, the national headquarters of the organizations launched a pilot program. According to the national partnership guide, this program was designed as a way for headquarters to monitor the best practices for success and conduct field research. The following excerpt discusses Ball State's involvement in the pilot program:

Due to the strength of both organizations on the Ball State campus, Best Buddies and Pi

Kappa Phi believe Ball State would be the optimal place in which to form the first university partnership. It is the vision of Pi Kappa Phi to host a campus-wide awareness event this year geared toward getting the word out about both organizations and involving the campus in the Disability Rights Movement with the support of Ball State Best Buddies. (J. Myers, personal communication, April 11, 2016)

While the pilot program has been monitored by headquarters' staff, no formal research has been done since its formation in August of 2014. This is the primary rationale for this research. The most effective approach to this unique research opportunity is through a *case study* (Creswell, 2013), which was conducted at Ball State University because of its particular involvement with the pilot program. According to its website, Ball State University is a state-assisted residential university of about 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Ball State is located in Muncie, Indiana, a mid-size Midwestern city of 70,000 people in East Central Indiana, 60 miles northeast of Indianapolis. Although the implications of this researcher may be applied to other similar cases, the main focus is on this case itself. Seeing that the focus of the research will involve data specific to the organizations associated with Ball State University and surrounding area, the case study will place its boundaries at this one specific university. This case study will be an *intrinsic case study* because the focus is on the uniqueness of the case itself, rather than an instrumental case study, which selects one issue and uses a case study to illustrate that point (Creswell, 2013).

Generally, the data is centered around the relationships of the two organizations on a local level. However, it would be difficult to study the relations between BB and PKP without mentioning a third, off-campus non-profit organization, Hillcroft Services. Hillcroft serves the same population as the other two organizations through a variety of different programs. As

stated on their website, their mission states a desire to support people with IDD by providing services for them and their families. This includes support through employment services, residential services, therapy services, and several others. BB and Hillcroft had an existing relationship before the national partnership between BB and TAE formed, but the addition of this third party created a *triangular-shaped relationship* between the three organizations. This case study will look into how these three organizations interact with one another and how each organization has felt the effects of the 2014 partnership between BB and TAE. However, this study will also attempt to incorporate research on a more personal level, by exploring the personal perceptions and experiences of several individuals from each organization.

The researcher has identified one central research question (CRQ) followed by four subsequent research questions (SQ1,2,3,4) to help guide and focus the research.

CRQ: What is the triangular relationship between Hillcroft Services, Best Buddies, and Pi Kappa Phi and their members?

SQ1: What are the organizational benefits from this partnership?

SQ2: What are significant weaknesses/areas of growth in the partnership?

SQ3: How have personal perceptions and expectations been affected by the partnership?

SQ4: What knowledge do the individuals of each organization possess about the partnership?

Methods

Qualitative data for this case study was collected through multiple sources to ensure an in-depth understanding of the case, which Creswell (2013) states is a hallmark of a good qualitative case study. The primary method of data collection was through a series of nine interviews conducted by the author. Interview questions corresponded with the CRQ and four

SQs, which resulted in responses on both organizational and personal levels. Seeing that the case study focuses on the relationships of multiple organizations, interviews were conducted with members of each organization. For PKP and BB, three colligate members were purposefully chosen to give voice to different perspectives. This resulted in interviews of individuals that are very involved and possess leadership roles within the organizations, members who are somewhat involved but do not serve in high leadership roles, and new members that show dedication and commitment to their organizations. The individuals that were chosen were primarily identified through snowball sampling, beginning with the most involved individuals. Snowball sampling identifies subjects by asking interviewees to name potential future interviewees that might be information-rich (Creswell, 2013). The interviews ranged in duration from 16 to 36 minutes, and word for word transcripts resulted in 78 typed single space pages. All interviewees were given pseudonyms, and all identifiers, besides organizational affiliation, were removed in order to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees.

The analysis of the interviews was done through a coding process that aggregated the data into smaller categories and then grouped into bigger themes. This iterative process began with the researcher identifying 20-25 codes pulled from the data. These codes were either areas of repetition or significance in the data. These codes were then classified into four themes. Not all the data from this qualitative research was able to be included in this process. Finally, the researcher engaged in interpreting the data, which includes going beyond the codes and themes to find the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Supplementary to this series of interviews, the author also engaged in personal communication through phone and email correspondence with individuals associated with the national headquarters of TAE and Indiana State Headquarters of BB (A. Matznick, personal

communication, February 10, 2016; N. Seibert, personal communication, February 21, 2016).

These interactions yielded valuable information and documents that helped to shape the boundaries and implications for the case study. Lastly, the author reviewed several documents and artifacts. These documents included partnership agreements between TAE and BB, goals of the partnership, the websites of each organization, and articles specific to this partnership. They also provide a tangible point of comparison against which findings from the interviews may be compared and analyzed.

At this point, it is important to recognize the internal positions of the researcher as a collegiate undergraduate member of the PKP chapter on Ball State University's campus. Although the researcher is a member of one of the organizations specifically being studied, none of his own observations will be included in the research in order to maintain the integrity and boundaries of the research. All the data will be from the series of interviews, headquarter correspondence, and review of documents and artifacts. The positions of the author will not yield bias, but instead this position was responsible for making the author aware of the unique opportunity to study the phenomenon that is taking place.

Findings

Through the qualitative research and coding processes, the author has identified several main categories of findings. These findings will be reported here, and supported and compared against existing related research when appropriate. These findings coincide neatly with the four SQ's listed in the methods section, with the four sections being *benefits, weaknesses, personal perceptions, and personal knowledge*.

Benefits

When this partnership was formed, it was intended to benefit the organizations and the people that it affected. The national partnership guide named potential benefits for PKP and BB, citing items that include increased promotion, participation, and new opportunities. In this first section, the benefits that were found in the data from this case study will be explored.

The first benefit is one of the most frequently cited in the interview series, and that was the increased number of males volunteering with BB and Hillcroft. Interviewees agreed that both Hillcroft and BB have very few regular male members or employees, and the PKP chapter is all male. Wemlinger and Berlan (2015) suggest that women are much more likely to volunteer in organizations that are traditionally female organizations. Traditionally female organizations are those that are “closely aligned with traditional roles of women, such as healthcare and religion” (p. 859). Since their primary missions are to provide care for people with disabilities, BB and Hillcroft may represent traditionally female organizations. In fact, several interviewees, both from BB and Hillcroft, said they were surprised when they heard that the male organization was reaching out to them. Lee (2009) makes an argument for why this gap may exist. He states that more females study “feminine subjects” like nursing and primary education, while male students enjoy a majority in more “masculine fields” such as mathematics and engineering. These differences may lead to choices regarding how people spend their time preparing for that career, such as volunteering. Especially when considering that a large base of Hillcroft’s volunteers are college students attempting to prepare for a career, males may not volunteer at Hillcroft or with BB because it may not help them in their overall career path. However, these arguments are based on stereotypes and traditional value systems. This partnership helps the men of PKP to break these stereotypes with the help of BB by offering their volunteerism.

The male clients saw the increase in male volunteers as more friends, because they were different than the female buddies and employees they see often. The interviewees consistently used the term “hang out” to describe the relationship the buddies had with the male clients. The female clients also enjoyed having the male volunteers around, but for different reasons. One BB interviewee recalls a story:

At our BBQ cook out thing last year, and all these girls were like fawning over him and everything, and like some guys would kinda be like a little bit like weary of that, but he just like welcomed it, he was like, “Let’s take pictures.” ... and it made their days and like they still talk about him to this day. So that was like, it really makes them really happy when people like genuinely care about them like that, and like take time to get to know them.

New faces and new male volunteers proved to be a huge benefit to BB and Hillcroft because it helps to better serve people with IDD.

Next, the theme of recruitment was a reoccurring benefit for all three organizations. Interviewees from all three organizations mentioned the new and strengthened ability to recruit for their own organization with this partnership intact. For example, PKP members could recruit the few male BB members by citing the unique Greek Life experience their organization could offer because of TAE. It has also been beneficial for PKP in the recruitment of new members that are not associated with BB. One of the PKP leaders said that during the new member rush process, everyone “he talked to about it has joined.” All three PKP members also said TAE was a large part of why they joined themselves, and none of them were associated with BB previously. Inversely, BB members hope to use this opportunity to increase the amount of male involvement through recruiting PKP members to their own organization.

Hillcroft employees cited the most instances of speaking about recruitment, especially regarding the PKP members. This is because of the need for males in the field, as well as the fact that a relationship already existed with BB, but this is a new opportunity and untapped pool of potential in PKP. Volunteers offer new people to talk to, new events, and ideas. Secondly, the employees of Hillcroft also seemed to be thinking about the “big picture.” For example, they attempt to recruit volunteers to become employees for part time or full time jobs. Hillcroft employees also look at the data and statistics related to recruiting and retaining volunteers. One interviewee mentioned that all volunteers help in “data collection,” and if she can keep track of when she found them, why they left, and other pertinent information, then it makes them more effective at recruiting in the future. Manetti, Bellucci, Corno, and Bagnoli (2014) explain that even if recruiting volunteers does not directly aid the organization monetarily, non-profit organizations are also interested in the indirect benefits that volunteers offer. These indirect benefits can vary, but some that were listed by the interviewees included volunteers helping with connections between on and off campus, volunteers planning events, and recruiting volunteers from different organizations helps to build organizational credibility.

The benefits are numerous for the organizations, but several interviewees reflected upon the positive influence that the buddies have felt from the partnership. This is an important benefit to mention, seeing that all three organizations state very clearly their dedication to support people with IDD. If the organizations benefit, then the clients who are served by these organizations also benefit. This desire to better serve people with IDD is the foundation for the partnership on a national level, as well as on a local level with these three organizations in the Muncie community.

Weaknesses

Along with the benefits, the data showed several areas of weakness in the partnership. This section is not designed to offer suggestions, but rather to report the themes found from data collection. However, these areas of growth will be given consideration later in this essay when suggestions for how to improve these areas will be discussed. Through the interviews, the researcher has identified three main areas of perceived weakness, which are communication, collegiate social interaction, and involvement.

These three organizations have only been working together since August 2014. Strides toward a successful partnership have been made, but there are still several areas of concern that arose from the data. First, it seems as if there is no established way to disseminate information, which causes miscommunication and inefficient communication. PKP has weekly chapter meetings, the BB executive board and TAE committee meet weekly, and BB and Hillcroft see each other weekly at events. However, these interactions do not seem to result in collaboration. As one of the interviewees pointed out, they are still separate leaderships. Just because there is a new partnership does not mean that these organizations know how to effectively work and communicate together.

So far, it appears there are no set responsibilities of who is supposed to interact with who, so people rely on the few main leaders to handle tasks that involve the other organizations. For example, the Hillcroft employee who is the contact person for BB has limited knowledge about PKP or BB beyond the events and clients. While the interactions have been positive, this Hillcroft employee is only familiar with the main leaders of BB and PKP. Along those same lines, the highly involved executive board members are the most informed about plans that include the other organizations. The information is not always received by other members or by

Hillcroft employees. This partnership has introduced a new aspect of communication because it involves working collaboratively with outside leadership, and it challenges the way that information is reported internally in each of these organizations.

Interviews were conducted with individuals from BB, PKP, and Hillcroft. Several interviewees offered data that might suggest an important organization has been excluded from this study, and that is Beyond I Can. The exclusion of Beyond I Can seems to be a product of this miscommunication. Beyond I Can is also a provider of buddies, but sometimes these buddies are not included in events and activities. One BB interviewee who was aware of this disconnect said this:

We have a lot of buddies that aren't part of Hillcroft, so maybe trying to see if somehow they could be included in your events, even though they aren't through Hillcroft, because about half of our buddies aren't through Hillcroft. So I think it would be cool if, because we work with Beyond I Can, and different places, too, so I think like it would be cool to see like all of those come together, and that maybe they are included.

Although Beyond I Can is a vital player in the success of BB and therefore the success of the partnership, the organization was only mentioned in three out of the nine interviews, all three by BB and Hillcroft members. This is an example of important information that might not have even been fully communicated to PKP members.

A second theme that reappeared as a weakness was the lack of social interaction between the collegiate members of PKP and BB. Since Hillcroft is not a student organization, this data was primarily derived from the interviews with college students. In several instances, interviewees expressed the desire to be more connected to the members of the other organization. For the most part they could explain the partnership and who the other group was, but found it

difficult to recall names or faces of members of the other organization. The BB new member, who is a very involved new member and future leader of the organization, did not even attempt to describe the relationship between BB and PKP because she did not have knowledge of PKP. While she remembers more males being at a few events, she stated, "If I talked to them, I didn't realize [who] they were." Several interviewees recognized that it is not friendships that are holding these two organizations together socially, but rather it is their interactions with the buddies that were the common denominator. Both organizations' members know the names of the buddies, but not the other collegiate members' names in the room. This partnership is designed to not only benefit the clients, but also the members of the organizations. This lack of identification can also be seen in the language used in the interviews. It was common for both organizations to use the terms "ours" or "theirs," suggesting that they did not feel completely involved with the other organizations. For example, a BB member said, "Right now we both kind of plan our separate events." A PKP member said, "We want to join... to be part of theirs a lot more." While both of these quotes suggest that this separatism might change in the future, the data shows that members currently feel a lack of relationships and constructive social interaction with the collegiate members of the other organization.

Lastly, the amount, nature, and degree of involvement of members of all organizations marked an area of weakness. Speaking about the fraternity men, both BB members and Hillcroft employees had very positive remarks about characteristics such as professionalism, willingness, open-mindedness, and commitment, but it was also found that these remarks only can be applied to the PKP members with whom they came into contact. For some of the Hillcroft employees, they could only recall one or two PKP members. Another active BB member said she could "probably pick out like ten." This seems to mark a lack of commitment on the part of many

active PKP members. However, in both of these cases, they spoke very highly of the men that they have met. They cited stories of PKP members getting their nails painted, driving long distances to BB events, and interacting with the buddies on campus in front of their friends.

Here is one such story about an interaction with a PKP member:

Yeah, we saw him on campus and [my buddy] like ran up to him and I wasn't even paying attention and I was talking to someone else and [my buddy] just was gone and like found him halfway across campus, we were across the scramble light and [my buddy] just found him, and just went over there. And just like walked up into his face and he was like standing there with a group of friends and he still like talked to him and didn't just blow him off. And that was really cool for me because he was like, "Oh, I remember you." [My buddy] was so excited. He was like, "He remembers me." He was so happy and stuff.

Because of his involvement, both the BB member and her buddy were able to recognize this particular PKP member. While this is a very positive story, there is only a small number of PKP members that BB and Hillcroft employees would be able to identify. Although PKP had around 60 active members, only ten or less were known from the other two branches of the partnership, which highlights an area of weakness.

From another perspective, I found that the new member of PKP was unable to identify any BB members, either. He was able to name one member, but knew her through means other than this partnership. The two more involved PKP members knew several BB members because of their higher level of involvement, but there are still many members that they would not know. One member of BB who I interviewed stated that she did not even know all of the new members' names in her own organization. Involvement is a weakness not only because of the low

proportions of members who attend events, but there also seems to be a lack of dedication that the members feel to the organization. This can be partly attributed to the desire for more social interaction. The topics of friendships, involvement were frequently discussed in the interviews. According to Steimel (2013), volunteer identification, which is the sense of “similarity, belonging, and loyalty and membership to an organization,” plays a significant role in people choosing to become volunteers and to continue to volunteer (p. 13). Perhaps the lack of involvement and social interaction leads the members to feel disconnected, and thus turning them away from volunteering extra time and effort.

Hillcroft employees want students from both groups to be more involved and even become regular volunteers or employees. Through the interviews, the researcher also found that the Hillcroft employees who are most involved with BB and PKP are extremely busy and unable to dedicate the time to improve relations and planning events. With their other time commitments, they see these two other organizations as a relief. For example, when PKP and BB plan and host the events, the employees can go into their office and catch up on their work. This is understandable, but it also leads to a lack of relationships between Hillcroft employees and the PKP and BB members, aside from the few with whom they speak. All three employees that I interviewed stated at least one thing that they wish they could do if they had more time, be that data collection, event planning, or event attendance. Their long list of responsibilities inhibits the amount of involvement that Hillcroft staff has had with the members of BB and PKP.

Overall, all interviewees desired a greater amount of member and employee “overlap,” meaning that more people should be more involved as volunteers, members, or employees of the other two organizations. There is some overlap now, including several of the interviewees, and they have stated that this makes a big difference in their own knowledge and relations with the

other organization. The interviewees felt as if more overlap would help communication, social relationships, and it would increase involvement from other members due to a sense of belonging and connection.

Personal perceptions

Up until this point, the focus has been primarily on organizational considerations, but this section will explore more of the personal aspects of the partnership. This section focuses on the personal impressions and opinions of the interviewees and how this affected their working with these other groups of people. The three areas that will be discussed are Hillcroft employees' perceptions of working with Ball State students, both Hillcroft's and BB's members' expectations of working with a Greek organization, and PKP members' experiences of working with adults with ID.

Ball State students are very important to the surround community, especially in volunteerism for local organizations, especially non-profit organizations. Its webpage on Ball State's website says that Student Voluntary Services (SVS) is one of the largest of organizations in the Office of Student Life. SVS sends over 2,000 students into the community, which shows the huge impact that Ball State can have on Muncie volunteerism efforts. In exploring this triangular relationship, the author wanted to discover not only organizational trends, but also the existing perceptions that the individuals involved within the organizations already hold at the beginning of this partnership. In the interviews, Hillcroft employees overall spoke very highly of the caliber of Ball State students that they have worked with, but they were also not hesitant to be honest about their bad experiences and times when their expectations were not met. Hillcroft enjoys the students because of their original ideas, connections to others, and their ability to help advocate for people with disabilities. The employees mentioned more long-term benefits that

volunteers offer than they did short-term benefits, which is what the students may feel they are providing. Interestingly, all three interviewees wanted to use volunteers as a recruiting and event-planning tool for Hillcroft in the future. However, just because Hillcroft enjoys Ball State volunteers because they help the organization in the long run, they also value each individual volunteer and what they have to offer. For example, one Hillcroft employee mentioned how flexible their organization is to meet the needs of Ball State volunteers. For example, they are willing to accommodate large groups, such as BB or PKP, small groups of three or four, or even individual volunteers. She mentioned that many students like to "travel in packs," but she did not say this negatively. Instead she has adopted the way that volunteering works to accommodate this trend in order to attract more volunteers. Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan (2009) say, "a person's social circle can be very important to both one's decision to volunteer, and to whether or not one will continue to do so" (p. 66). Hillcroft employees rely on the Ball State volunteers, and these volunteers will be more likely to volunteer once and come back if their entire group is coming, or if a group of friends is going and they can volunteer together.

Another aspect of Ball State students is that they often lack experience in this field. This point will be discussed in depth in the section about PKP members working with adults with IDD. Hillcroft employees do not want to turn down any volunteers. One Hillcroft interviewee emphasized the idea that they will work with volunteers or future employees who are uncomfortable and help them along the way. However, they do respect that this line of work is not for everyone. Hillcroft employees both care about their organization and its future, as well as the individual Ball State volunteers and groups that offer their time and effort.

The next area of focus was the impressions of BB and Hillcroft individuals on Fraternities and/or Greek Life. Although Marton, Hevel, Asel, and Pascarella (2011) indicate

that fraternity and sorority membership does not negatively affect moral reasoning or critical thinking, Greek organizations have received a lot of negative media coverage and stereotypes. The author was interested in exploring this dichotomy by examining how individuals felt about the new partnership with a Greek organization. First, there was not a large amount of concern expressed by the BB members and Hillcroft employees about the new organization being Greek affiliated. Instead, the terms "confused," "surprised," and "unexpected" were often used to describe their feelings about the introduction of the Greek organization. PKP originally reached out to both organizations, and this action seemed to have a positive impact on the reception of the organization because it suggested high commitment and a desire to be an active part of it. To illustrate this point, one Hillcroft employee noted, "Most of the fraternities aren't going to reach out if they aren't interested in really doing this."

As mentioned in the above section, Hillcroft employees were honest about negative experiences with groups of students. From all three Hillcroft employees, one negative experience with a Ball State sorority was mentioned frequently. The sorority "fell through," did not provide enough food, and did not interact positively with the clients at the event they hosted. Since they have had limited experience with Greek organizations, this left a bad impression for Ball State Greek Life in general. Regarding working with PKP, they mentioned phrases like "they exceeded expectations", "they followed through", "they were committed", and "they have improved". PKP has been a positive experience for Hillcroft up until this point, but the term "exceeded expectations" was also used by both BB members and Hillcroft members. This may suggest that expectations were not very high in the beginning for these interviewees.

In fact, it appeared as if the interviewee with the most negative outlook on PKP's involvement was a PKP member. While he did not necessarily think poorly of the organization,

he thought that Hillcroft did because of their Greek affiliation. However, the most positive responses to PKP being Greek came from a Hillcroft interviewee and a BB interviewee. The Hillcroft employee cited her Greek-affiliated husband's community service work as her reasoning for such an affirmative reaction to PKP. The BB member also has had previous positive experiences with members of PKP before this partnership, and her family had men involved in PKP in the past. These findings show that there are both positive and negative impressions of working with Greek organizations in community service.

Coupled with first impressions of being Greek, PKP also did not have experience working with people with IDD. Hillcroft interviewees were unconcerned with this lack of experience. They were accustomed to volunteers, interns, and new employees having little to no experience. BB was more concerned with the lack of experience that they were about the organization being Greek. This has been a worry for BB because they have had some students try to join BB but quit early in the semester because they have a lack of experience working with people with IDD. Whether it was previous work with a sorority or inexperienced BB members, both organizations had initial areas of concern surround PKP members, but they also both had positive perceptions from several interviewees, as well. Lastly, any time a negative stereotype or first impression was mentioned, it was almost immediately contrasted with affirmation that it has not been a problem with PKP members.

Lastly, the author explored this notion of PKP members interacting with people with IDD for the first time. While Hillcroft employees and BB members do so on a daily or weekly basis, many of the PKP members do not have that same experience. In the interviewees, members of Hillcroft and BB were very complimentary on the improvement of PKP members from the first to most recent event regarding their ability to positively interact with the clients. Both

organizations cited a “willingness to try,” which was greatly appreciated. However, in the beginning a lot of members were still uncomfortable and unsure what to do. One BB member suggested that this was not a lack of skill, but more a lack of dispersion at events. This same interviewee was active in the breaking apart of PKP members at one of their first events. This is how she described her actions:

I would like bring them a buddy or something, like I knew the buddy, and I'd be like, “Hey come talk to this person, this person likes...” then I would make up something that probably wasn't the truth, but whatever. But that was just like a good way to get people introduced and everything.

Another recurring theme is that Hillcroft employees and BB members have helped PKP members with their social interactions. The PKP new member was very grateful for this, and actually said a brief talk that Hillcroft employees held at the end of one of the events “helped a lot” with feeling less intimidated and more comfortable. He expressed interest in Hillcroft conducting more of those talks to guide and teach PKP members. This same interviewee discussed his journey of working with individuals with disabilities. With limited experience before this year, he said:

I didn't really have empathy, is that it? I hadn't- like I felt sorry for them, I didn't put myself in their shoes, like I felt sorry but I didn't, and I didn't really look past their abilities that much, or their disabilities.... I feel like I'm more understanding what they are going through, and more understanding with just them in general.

This quote shows that PKP's involvement has made a difference in the attitude of a new PKP member. Another PKP member had a similar statement about the way that this experience has helped him to see the abilities versus the disabilities of the buddies. He said, “They have

different abilities. So it has helped me dramatically and to obviously not think of them that way, and so it's been great." This PKP was a leader in the organization and was excited about the practical implications of these events to be an outward application of TAE's mission. Lastly, the third PKP member uses these opportunities to further develop his skills and connections as he pursues a career in working with adults with disabilities. He is happy about the hands on aspect, and the ability for the organization to talk and interact with people with IDD. This data shows that while some people were cautious about PKP's lack of experience and others were not, PKP members have benefitted from building these relationships and hands-on learning.

Knowledge

Lastly, the researcher found themes in the data regarding the timeline and degree of knowledge about the national partnership. This information may be significant when considering how this information interacts with the other results. This data can help identify areas in which knowledge of the partnership is low and how that dissemination could be more effective.

In the interviews, the author carefully selected a new member from PKP and BB that has been very involved and likely would represent one of the more up-to-date new members in each organization. Despite this fact, the new members lacked much of the knowledge that the executive board members did about the partnership. Although this does not sound problematic, the new members seemed to lack information that was important to the partnership. For example, the BB new member had never heard of TAE before being contacted about doing an interview for this research. The PKP new member had heard of BB, but could not describe what Hillcroft was aside from the very basics. This data does not question the new members'

intelligence or involvement, but instead it points out that there is a break in dissemination of information in the organizations.

Hillcroft, which is a third party organization in this partnership, also seemed to lack knowledge aside from the fact that a new fraternity is now working with them. For two of the interviewees, the author explained the partnership and TAE for the first time to them. However, Hillcroft has only become involved in the partnership through the official partnership of BB and TAE, so any information that they have received has been through PKP or BB members. Regarding information about the partnership, events, and BB and Hillcroft, the three PKP members showed the most background knowledge. They mentioned three ways that PKP members receive this information: information nights, chapter meetings, and new member education meetings. Although PKP has the most developed knowledge of the partnership it was clear that this was the first connection that PKP has had with Hillcroft or BB. This knowledge of the partnership does not necessarily translate into the most knowledge about the other two organizations. PKP is the new group in the triangular relationship while the other two have had existing relationships in the past.

Discussion

Being a case study, this information is specific to the three organizations at Ball State University and Muncie, Indiana. However, there is evidence that three-way relationships like this are already formed and are forming around the country with PKP and BB partnerships. As part of the pilot program this research is the first to explore different aspects of how this partnership works on a local level. In this discussion, the key findings from each Sub Research Question (SQ1,2,3,4) will be discussed, along with the Central Research Question (CRQ) as an overview of the findings.

SQ1: What benefits has each organization felt with this partnership?

While there are numerous benefits that were found in this partnership, they can be narrowed down to a few major themes. The first was the positive impact that an increased number of males had on the clients. The new male volunteers were seen more as friends and able to “hang out” more than the female volunteers and buddies. The males played sports and had fun with the other male clients, while the female clients “fawned” over the males. These interactions were fun for the buddies, mentors, and volunteers, but perhaps not the intent of the partnership. Another benefit was recruitment for all three organizations. It increases credibility from all three perspectives and helps them to stand out and build more connections. There were also several intangible benefits listed, primarily from Hillcroft, such as bridging on and off campus, advocacy, and the increase in new volunteers and information that helped Hillcroft with volunteer data collection. However, the entire benefits section seemed to come back to the idea that this partnership benefits the clients. Whether it’s the male influence, the increased volunteers or members, or the connections and advocacy, the underlying goal of all three organizations is to better serve people with IDD.

SQ2: What are significant weaknesses/areas of growth in the partnership?

The three areas of focus for this section were communication, social interaction, and involvement. Communication is vital for effective event planning, especially for a partnership like this one, which involves separate organizations and groups of people. With a new partnership, miscommunication can be expected to happen, especially considering that the headquarters of both of these organizations gave primary responsibility to each local chapter. Concerns arose with how the separate leaders communicate and make sure that everybody gets the information they need efficiently and that nobody is left out. Although there are meetings

and communication between the organizations, the events are primarily planned separately. Several interviewees expressed interest in working on a collaborative event to make it a shared event. The author also suggests establishing a set contract of goals and an established form or line of communication. While the organizations should adhere to the national partnership guide, it could be beneficial for the local chapters to establish their own local contract, as well.

Next, the collegiate members of PKP and BB expressed dissatisfaction in the way that social interaction between these two groups takes place. Instead of having friendships themselves, they all have stronger relationships with the buddies. To establish more social interaction between the buddies, two interviewees suggested social events with no buddies. In the end, this could benefit the buddies because the members will get along better, and they will be more willing to volunteer and more often because they will know more people and feel involved (Steimel, 2013). Lastly, there is a lack of people who dedicate significant time and effort to the partnership. There are a few very committed in each organization, but a suggested remedy is more overlap in the members involved in each of the organization. This means that between the three organizations, more members should be part of two or three of the organizations. This would increase relationships, and it would also increase commitment, ability, and dedication of those individuals. Having more people involved in the other organizations could naturally provide liaisons, which would help with communication issues.

SQ3: How have personal perceptions and expectations affected the relationships?

This question dealt more with individual perceptions rather than organizational topics. First, Hillcroft thinks very highly of Ball State students. They try to make it easier to volunteer to meet their needs, and they enjoy students not only for their time, but also for the intangible benefits of connections, recruitment, and new sources of data collection. The author found

mixed results about Greek perceptions from the two non-Greek organizations. Overall, the feedback from the interviews was not negative, but the general findings were more “surprise” and “confusion.” PKP members expressed the most concern about being a Greek organization working with a non-profit organization, and the two most positive expressions toward this Greek-affiliation were members of BB and Hillcroft who both had family ties with fraternities. Hillcroft members also had a bad experience with a sorority that planned an event with them, which may have unconsciously jaded their view of Greek organizations, and also making their experience with PKP exceed expectations.

There was mixed results on the lack of experience that many PKP members bring to the partnership. BB members were more concerned with this shortage in skill set because of their past experiences with inexperienced new members quitting. On the other hand, Hillcroft was unfazed by the introduction of numerous inexperienced volunteers. They are more than willing to help anyone who does not feel comfortable around people with disabilities. For PKP members, no matter the degree of experience one possesses, being involved with BB and Hillcroft has had a very profound effect on the attitude of members towards people with disabilities.

SQ4: What knowledge do the individuals of each organization possess about the partnership?

Overall, the author found a general lack of background knowledge of the partnership in all three organizations. The involved new members are significantly less knowledgeable than the executive board and leaders, as would be expected. Hillcroft has very limited experience and knowledge with the partnership because of its status as a third party, non-collegiate organization in this relationship. Generally speaking, Hillcroft did not know the background about the

partnership, PKP members did not know any details about Hillcroft's many programs, and BB did not know about the services of TAE. In the end, the researchers found that PKP members tended to be the most educated on the partnership itself because of the weekly meetings and new member education sessions.

CRQ: What is the triangular relationship between Hillcroft, BB, and PKP and their members?

After addressing the key findings from the four sub-research questions, the greater Central Research Question pertains to the triangular relationship as a whole. This includes organizational benefits and concerns, and well as personal perceptions and knowledge. The simple answer to the CRQ is that this relationship is not a triangle. First, calling it a "triangular" relationship oversimplifies the amount of people involved, people affected, and aspects that go into a partnership. From the headquarters' standpoint, as evident in the goals and partnership guide, the idea of a partnership is much more organizationally focused. However, the researchers also focused on how it affects local communities and individuals, and these affects cannot be represented in a triangle. Another reason it is not a triangle is because that term assumes that is an equilateral triangle. Depending on the topic at hand, the "length" of each leg is going to differ between the three organizations. All three organizations play different roles and contribute varying amounts of energy to the partnership. For example, both PKP and BB are very dependent on Hillcroft to supply clients and a location for events. Without Hillcroft, this partnership would not be able to exist. BB and Hillcroft had an existing relationship, so PKP as the new comer needs to find its role within the three-way partnership.

Without PKP initially reaching out to Hillcroft or BB in the first place, or without PKP's effort to maintain communication, the triangle might have fallen apart. PKP seems to be the

main driving force to keep the partnership triangular. PKP reached out to Hillcroft before the partnership with BB was established, but the PKP and Hillcroft relationship has not been as strong as the one between BB and Hillcroft. This shows that the triangle legs also do not have the same “strength.” PKP is a new addition to the partnership that BB and Hillcroft already had established. Hillcroft and BB have been very beneficially in building up PKP, while PKP has supplied things like events, money, connections, and male volunteers. On campus, BB and PKP have been active in strengthening the relationship between the two student organizations through collaboration and inclusion in the planning of each other’s events. Lastly, one must consider that perhaps this triangle is missing an entire leg. Even though it seems to be left out in many conversations, Beyond I Can is significant in the relationships and successes of the other organizations because it is a supplier of clients and information for BB. PKP volunteers serve these clients, and events for all buddies and volunteers are hosted at Hillcroft.

After conducting a number of qualitative research interviews, the author was inconclusive as to whether or not Ball State University represents an ideal local partnership, but it can assured that great things are happening at this location. These three organizations are enhanced through the relationship, all for the same goal: service to people with disabilities. This local partnership is clearly good for the buddies, good for individuals who are members and employees, good for the organizations, good for the community, and a good example within the pilot program of a local level of a national partnership.

Limitations

The researcher recognizes that there are several limitations to this study. One limitation is the author’s personal involvement in one of the three organizations being studied. While the author attempted to remain unbiased and to abstain from looking at the data through a “lens,”

this still might have come into play. For example, interviews can sometimes make interviewees less willing to tell the truth or be completely honest because of the face-to-face contact. If they interviewees know of the affiliation of the interviewer, they might be even less willing to discuss negative information.

Next, while nine interviews were sufficient in effectively reaching the point of saturation, perhaps these interviews were not comprehensive or fully representational of the thoughts and feelings of their entire organizations. While sampling and selection was carefully done, perhaps another form of data collection aside from the interviews, personal correspondence, and artifact and review document should have taken place to help ensure that all members felt represented.

Lastly, this research is designed as a case study, which means that transferability may be limited. Perhaps this information is only relevant to the local community at Ball State, which greatly narrows the practical implications of this research.

Practical Implications

This section will attempt to offer practical implications for this research. In other words, how can this essay lead to action that will help the organizations or the partnership all-together? Below are several suggestions of what the organizations should consider implementing, or next steps in what the partnership should do. This first list includes implications that remain within the boundaries of this case study at Ball State.

- To further the reach of this partnership, the organizations should consider more effectively including Beyond I Can. Since it has no existing relationship with Beyond I Can, PKP should consider making contact with this organization via BB.
- To build connections and stronger identification, Ball State should consider more overlap in PKP, BB, and Hillcroft. This includes overlap in membership and employees, but also

creative organizational overlap. For example, Hillcroft and BB could more often host training for PKP members to improve their skills.

- To improve social interaction of collegiate members, the PKP and BB should consider planning a social event only for the Ball State students without buddies being present. This would help to build friendships and provide greater reason for volunteers to feel a desire to return.
- PKP and BB should consider planning an event collaboratively to discourage “our” and “their” language.
- To make members more knowledgeable about the partnership and the other organizations, all three organizations should consider new ways to include this information in their new member/employee/volunteer information.

This list of implications goes beyond Ball State, and offers suggestions for local chapters that can be derived from this research.

- This partnership is mutually benefitting. If a chapter of PKP or BB exists at a university and the other does not, the existing organization should consider establishing the other at that university. This is consistent with the national goals of increasing the number of chapters nation-wide.
- The inclusion of a third, off-campus organization has proved beneficial for the success of the partnership between PKP and BB at Ball State. Chapters should consider identifying and establishing connections with such an organization at their respective locations.
- To help establish connection and communication, PKP, BB, and third party organizations should consider encouraging overlap in organizational membership. This is consistent

with the national goals of more PKP members and BB members being involved in the other organizations.

- In order to build a foundation of communication and expectations, local chapters should consider building their own contracts in addition to the National Partnership Guide. This contract could outline goals, expectations, and methods of internal and external communication regarding the partnership.

Future Studies

With a variety of sub-research questions, the researcher hoped to address some of the important issues and build a foundation for future research. The researcher is also aware that this essay tends to cover many topics without delving deep into any one topic or consulting large amount of previous research in related topics. This was done by design as an exploratory research project. This purposefully broad study will provide a “spring board” for a number of future studies to support, contradict, and supplement the research found in this essay.

- One future study could take one of these areas and dig deeper into that concept using Ball State as a case study. Future studies may look further into one of the benefits, weaknesses, personal perceptions, or knowledge of the partnership.
- To further the body of research surrounding Ball State University, a study could be conducted that includes Beyond I Can. This could help to determine the shape of the organizational partnerships.
- This is a case study of two strong chapters at a university. A case study from another university, perhaps one in the pilot program as well, that studies similar topics would provide a point of comparison. For example, universities where one chapter is clearly

stronger than the other may yield different results. Another direction may look at universities without a community partner.

- The timeliness of this research is important. In the future, follow-up studies could be done of the same organizations to see how things have changed/improved/worsened in the time between research projects.

References

- About Muncie. (2016). *Ball State University*. Retrieved from <http://cms.bsu.edu/about/visithecampus/gettinghere/aboutmuncie>
- About The Ability Experience. (2014). *The Ability Experience: A Pi Kappa Phi Philanthropy*. Retrieved from <http://www.abilityexperience.org/pushcontent.aspx?id=4664>
- Best Buddies Push America Pi Kappa Phi National Partnership. (PDF File) (n.d.). Best Buddies International.
- Caldwell, S. D., Farmer, S. M., & Fedor, D. B.. (2008). The influence of age on volunteer contributions in a nonprofit organization. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(3), 311-333. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30162628>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches, third edition*. Sage: University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Print.
- Fact Book. (2016). *Ball State University*. Retrieved from <http://cms.bsu.edu/about/factbook>
- Haski-Leventhal, D. & Cnaan, R. A. (2009) Group processes and volunteering: Using groups to enhance volunteerism. *Administration in Social Work*, 33(1), 61-80. DOI: 10.1080/03643100802508635
- Horman, J. (2014). The ability experience and best buddies, a wonderful partnership. Star & Lamp: Pi Kappa Phi. Retrieved from <http://www.starandlamp.com/index.php/columns/s-l-spotlight/item/495-the-ability-experience-and-best-buddies-a-wonderful-partnership>
- Lee, Y. J. (2009). The determinants of sector choice: What attracts people to the nonprofit sector and are there gender differences? Paper presented at the Public Management Research Conference, Columbus, OH.
- Manetti, G., Bellucci, M., Corno, E., & Bagnoli, L. (2015). Investing in volunteering: Measuring social returns of volunteer recruitment, training and management. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organization*, 26(5). 2104-2129.
- Martin, G. L., Hevel, M. S., Asel, A. H., & Pascarella, E. T. (2011). New evidence on the effects of fraternity and sorority affiliation during the first year of college. *Journal of College Student Development* 52(5). 543-559.
- Mission. (2016). *Best Buddies International*. Retrieved from <https://bestbuddies.org/what-we-do/mission-vision-goals/>
- Steimel, S. (2013). Connecting with volunteers: Memorable messages and volunteer identification. *Communication Research Reports*, 30(1), 12-21. doi:10.1080/08824096.2012.746220

Student Volunteer Services. (2016) *Ball State University*. Retrieved from <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/svs>

Wemlinger, E. & Berlan, M. R. (2016). Does gender equality influence volunteerism? A cross-national analysis of women's volunteering habits and gender equality. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 853-873.

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE: February 1, 2016

TO: Evan Neace

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 859573-1

TITLE: The Ability Experience and Best Buddies International: A National Partnership
on a Local Level

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: **DETERMINATION OF NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH**

DECISION DATE: February 1, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

The Institutional Review Board received the above protocol. After review and consideration, the IRB concluded that this project does not meet the definition of 'research with human subjects' at this time, as specified by federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.

Research: A systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

(Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes.)

Human Subject: A living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information.

Consequently, this project does not require IRB approval as submitted. The IRB accepts this information for our records and will retain it in our files. Thank you for providing the IRB with these materials for review. Please contact the Office of Research Integrity if any details of the study are to change so that the IRB may reconsider the protocol, if necessary.

If you have any questions regarding this decision or would like to respond in person, please contact the Office of Research Integrity.

Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity